Congregation of the Lord Jesus Christ,

The Book of Proverbs has been described as Practical Wisdom for Godly Living. In very plain language, and as a general rule, it says: If you want to know blessing, do this and don’t do that. Now, just so we are clear, **the blessings of God are a gift of** **grace**; they are never earned. The promises of Proverbs are not *what we deserve* if we do what is commanded; they are a *gracious* gift. Nevertheless, the Lord does use means; He lays out certain pathways that generally result in blessing.

And I make this point for two reasons:

1. First, the home described in this passage has a father a mother and children. But that is not the reality for everyone. There are single parents. There are blended families. There are unbelieving spouses. There is infertility. So **is the Bible out of touch**, **somehow**? Can the Lord still bring blessing when a family situation does not match the one pictured here? And the answer is: Yes, He can!
2. And second, because all of God’s gifts are gifts of grace, you need to know that there is hope for blessing even when you have mucked things up! So you might hear things today that lead you to recognize, that is not my situation, or, I have not been doing that, or I should not have done that. But that doesn’t mean you cannot know God’s blessing. In Jesus Christ, there is forgiveness and renewal and real hope! OK?

But we have to start with God’s ordinary means of blessing. And it is set before us in the three parts of this passage: It begins with **the 5th Commandment Applied to a Home with Elderly Parents** and it ends with **a Picture of a Happy 5th Commandment Home** – a rejoicing father, a glad mother, and a wise son. And in the middle we have **the gospel key to this happy 5th Commandment home**. And there is wisdom in this passage for all of us, even if we do not have living parents or children of our own.

1. So first, we see **the 5th Commandment Applied to a Home with Elderly Parents**.
   1. The 5th Commandment is very simple and direct: “*Honour your father and mother*.” It is a commandment that is repeated 7 times in the New Testament! And in **Hebrews 12:9** it says, “*We [all] have had earthly fathers … and we respected them*.” One commentator describes this as a basic rule of nature – children are to respect their parents – this is the law of God.
   2. And the wise teacher of Proverbs also applies this to when our parents are elderly: “*Do not despise your mother when she is old*.” When a child is young and in the family home, there is an aspect of duty to the respect they owe their parents. But when children are adults and have left home and have established homes of their own, to still see them honouring and respecting their parents, voluntarily, that is a good thing.
      1. A couple of chapters back in **Proverbs 19:26** it says, “*He who does violence to his father and chases away his mother is a son who brings shame and reproach*.” **1 Timothy 5:7-8** says, “*If anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for members of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever*.” So, the Lord takes a very dim view of children failing to honour and care for their parents.
      2. But **2 Timothy 3:1-5** tells us that this type of attitude will increasingly define people in the last days. We are told that “*in the last days* … *people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents.*”
      3. But it should not be like this with believers. What we ought to do instead is to imitate the **good examples we have in Scripture**: Think of Joseph’s concern for Jacob when he met his brothers in Egypt and how he cared for his elderly father. Think of Ruth with Naomi, her mother-in-law. But above all these, think of those words we read a few moments ago as the Lord Jesus kept the 5th Commandment, *even as He was dying on the cross,* in His care and respect for His mother, Mary.
      4. So, “*do not despise your mother when she is old*.”
   3. Now, this is not a requirement that we **absolutely** **and** **unconditionally** do whatever our parents tell us to do or that we must always agree with their choices. Our first allegiance is to God and His commands. And there may be times when our allegiance to God can put us at odds with our parents. But let’s be honest, here, is the typical problem of our age too much respect and care for elderly parents? No. The typical problem is not nearly enough respect and care for elderly parents.
      1. Think of how the term ‘**Boomer’** is thrown around by young folk to disdainfully show how out of touch and dumb the older generation is. When one Member of Parliament did this to an older member of parliament a while back she was viewed by many as a kind of youth hero.
      2. As one commentator puts it: “Instead of thinking, ‘This person is older and probably has something to teach me that I don’t know yet,’ we figure, ‘This person is old and out of date and funny looking and is best ignored.’ Older folks deserve better, especially Mom and Dad. Even into old age we must honour our parents.”
2. Well, how we do this is a part of our second point, from **verse 23**, which is **The Gospel Key to this 5th Commandment Home**.
   1. And at first read it sounds odd: “*Buy truth, and do not sell it; buy wisdom, instruction, and understanding*.” Does anyone know of a shop nearby that sells truth? If you do, please tell us! So what does the wise teacher of Proverbs have in mind with these words? Well, a good rule of Bible study is to look for other passages of the Bible that use the same words or ideas as the passage you are looking at.
      1. And that is why we read **Matthew 13** earlier. That is where Jesus said, “*The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up. Then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls, who, on finding one pearl of great value, went and sold all that he had and bought it*.”
      2. And Jesus uses similar language in **Revelation 3:18** : “*I counsel you to buy from me gold refined by fire, so that you may be rich … and salve to anoint your eyes, so that you may see*.”
      3. We also see similar language back in **Isaiah 55:1-3**: “*Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labour for that which does not satisfy?*”
      4. Do you see the point that is being made with this ‘buy’ language? It is not that you can actually buy salvation; **Romans 6:23** tells us that salvation in Jesus Christ is *“the free gift of God.”* **Romans 10:9** says, “*If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved*.” So, what is this “buy it” language all about?
         1. Well, think of the thing you bought from TradeMe or FB Market place. You saw the ad and it was a good deal. So you decided you just had to have it. So you saved up for it. And you thought about it all the time. And you watched the auction run, very closely. Why? Because you valued that item.
         2. So this “buy” language is emphasizing the preciousness and the value of knowing Christ as your Saviour and Lord. When you see the word “truth,” what is your first thought? I hope it is **John 14:6**, where Jesus said, “*I am the way, the truth, and the life*.” So what we should value and apply ourselves to, more than anything else, is knowing Jesus Christ as our Saviour and Lord. That is the heart of what buying truth means.
   2. And God describes it this way because He has designed very ordinary means by which we come to know Jesus Christ. So we read, “Buy wisdom, instruction, and understanding.” The wise teacher of Proverbs is saying, Children, the ordinary way that you will come to know Jesus is Christ is through instruction. Look back at **verse 12**: “*Apply your heart to instruction and your ears to words of knowledge*.” So boys and girls, where is the most obvious source of instruction that you must apply your heart to? Here is a clue: They are sitting right next to you! Look back at **verse 22** – “*listen to your father* *and do not despise your mother when she is old*.” So you must apply your heart to the instruction of your parents. They are the ones that God has given you as your primary or first teachers about Christ. So you must welcome and value their wisdom and instruction and understanding! And this has implications, of course, for children and for parents. The instruction of godly parents comes in at least four ways:
      1. The first way is the way of **prayer**. Parents, pray for every aspect of your parenting. Pray for wisdom and consistency and that the Spirit would accompany all that you say and do.
      2. The second way is the way of **teaching**. Proverbs begins with 8 whole chapters of a father saying to his son, do this and do not do that – this is the pathway of blessing and this is the pathway of curse. **Deuteronomy 6** says of God’s commandments, “*You shall teach them diligently to your children and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise*.” In other words, parents, teach your children about Christ and His word, always. And this is why we hand out books at baptisms, and why family devotions at meal times and a bible story and prayer at bedtime are so important.
         1. We see an example of this in Timothy. Timothy was taught about Christ by his mother and his grandmother. And Paul says, “*As for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus*.”
         2. So you boys and girls must welcome the bible teaching of your parents. Be thankful that they remind you to do your catechism homework and to memorize your verses. And so long as you do it respectfully, you can even remind Mum or Dad to read a Bible story if it looks like they have forgotten. That is what ‘buying truth and wisdom and instruction’ looks like for you in relation to teaching.
      3. But a third way that godly parents instruct their children is by **discipline**. And it is not everything that could be said about biblical discipline, but because of what our government says and because of what so many child-raising ‘experts’ say, which is what our children keep hearing, we need to hear God’s wisdom on this matter. And I won’t add to it or explain it; let’s just hear God speak. Look at **verse 13**: “*Do not withhold discipline from a child; if you strike him with a rod, he will not die. If you strike him with the rod, you will save his soul from Sheol* [hell].”
         1. And you boys and girls must welcome the godly discipline of your parents and recognize that they do it to “*save your soul from Sheol*.” Your attitude needs to be, as our Catechism puts it, “that I obey and submit to [my parents], as is proper, when they correct and punish me; and also that I be patient with their failings for through them God chooses to rule us.” That is what ‘buying truth and wisdom and instruction’ looks like for you in relation to discipline.
      4. And the fourth part of godly instruction is the way of **example**. I am sure you have heard it said before that what we do speaks more loudly than what we say. And so, the example of devotion to Christ that a father and mother set for their children is massively important.
         1. I read a number of bulletins from other RCNZ churches each week and last Sunday one of them had an article with some statistics about the importance of a father’s example. And again, I hasten to say that statistics are just that – statistics. And keep in mind also what we said earlier about God’s grace if no father is present or he is not a believer.

But according to data collected by Promise Keepers and Baptist Press, if a father does not go to church, even if his wife does, only 1 child in 50 will become a regular worshiper. If a father does go regularly, regardless of what the mother does, between 2/3rds and 3/4 of their children will attend church as adults.

Another study, focused on Bible study attendance, found similar results:

- When both parents attend BS in addition to the Sunday services, 72% of their children attend Bible study when grown.

- When only the father attends BS, 55% of the children attend when grown.

- When only the mother attends BS, 15% of the children attend when grown.

- When neither parent attends BS, only 6% of the children attend when grown.

So here is the basic point of these statistics: Fathers, your example is very important for your children’s spiritual welfare. It is why the Scriptures place so much emphasis on the duty of fathers.

* + 1. So, the ordinary means that God has designed by which children come to know Jesus Christ is a father and mother who love the Lord Jesus Christ, which is why they are committed to praying, teaching, discipline, and setting a godly example. I hasten to add though that none of us are anywhere close to perfect in these things. I have never met a parent who said, “Wow! I am not surprised my children are believers, because I am such a good parent!” What I do hear is, “It is a miracle that my children are believers, because I fail, so often, as a parent.” So, when any child professes faith in Christ, we praise *God* for a work of *grace* by His *Spirit*!
       1. And let me remind you also that the Bible is not a collection of stories about perfectly godly families. If you want to know about dysfunctional families, you will find them on *every* page of the Bible. But God is faithful! And His grace can overrule our failures. So, we are in good company with our dysfunction, so long as we pray that the Spirit would help us to make godly change where it is needed.
       2. And again, if you have heard all this and you are saying to yourself, Oh no! I did not do that, or, I have not been doing that, or I should not have done that, remember that in Jesus there is forgiveness and renewal and real hope!
  1. But before we move on to our third and final point, this is also why **active participation in the life of a church family** is so important. When a child is baptized at Avondale, I invite the congregation to promise to pray for the child, to help care for his/her instruction in the faith, and to encourage and sustain him/her in the fellowship of believers. Do you do that here also? I never thought I would quote Hillary Clinton in a sermon, but she said, “It takes a village to raise a child.” Well, if we take out village and put in church, it is correct! It takes a church to raise a child, because a church widens a child’s exposure to godly instruction and it multiplies examples of devotion to Christ.
  2. So, boys and girls, “*Buy truth, and do not sell it; buy wisdom, instruction, and understanding*.” Seek Jesus Christ as you most precious possession. And do that by applying “*your heart to instruction and your ears to words of knowledge*.”

1. Well, that brings us, thirdly and lastly, to verses 24-25 and **the picture of a happy 5th Commandment home** – a rejoicing father, a glad mother, and a wise son.
   1. On one wall at home there is a family portrait. We had it done several years ago. There are a few more grey hairs since it was taken and a kilo or two which we won’t mention, and of course, our children have grown up since the photo was taken, which means they are embarrassed that visitors get to see them when they were just kids ☺ And I am sure that many of us will have family portraits of a smiling bunch of humans. But not every family portrait generates happy memories. In fact, they can be a reminder of lots of pain, past or present.
   2. Well, the family portrait described in verses 24-25 is a scene of joy and gladness. This father and mother are greatly rejoicing and glad because they have righteous and wise children. So the wise teacher of Proverbs is saying to children, be they young or old, if you want to make your parents happy, love Jesus Christ and love His Word and love His people and love to obey the commands of Christ! Will they be happy if you get an A on a math test? Yes. Will they be happy if you are player of the day in your sports team? Yes. Will they be happy if you get a good job and get married? Yes. But nothing fills a godly parent’s heart with more gladness and rejoicing than to see their children choose to follow Christ.
   3. But on the flip side, nothing fills a godly parent’s heart with more sorrow than to see their children turn their back on Christ or refuse to embrace Him. Again, when we baptize children, we pray that God would govern them by His Holy Spirit. We pray that the Lord would enable them to respond in faith to the gospel. We ask the Lord to make the champions of righteousness under the direction of Jesus Christ, our only teacher, king, and high priest. And we pray that the Lord would give them the courage to fight against and overcome sin, the devil and his whole dominion. And we ask the Lord that their lives might become an eternal song of praise to Him. But we also regularly pray that children, young or old, who have turned their back on the Lord or who have thus far refused to receive Him as Saviour and Lord might turn to Him in repentance and faith. And we ought to pray these things, regularly, here in church and in our homes.

May it be that the Spirit of the Lord would be pleased to answer these prayers such that the spiritual family portrait for each home represented here is like the happy home of Proverbs 23. Amen.